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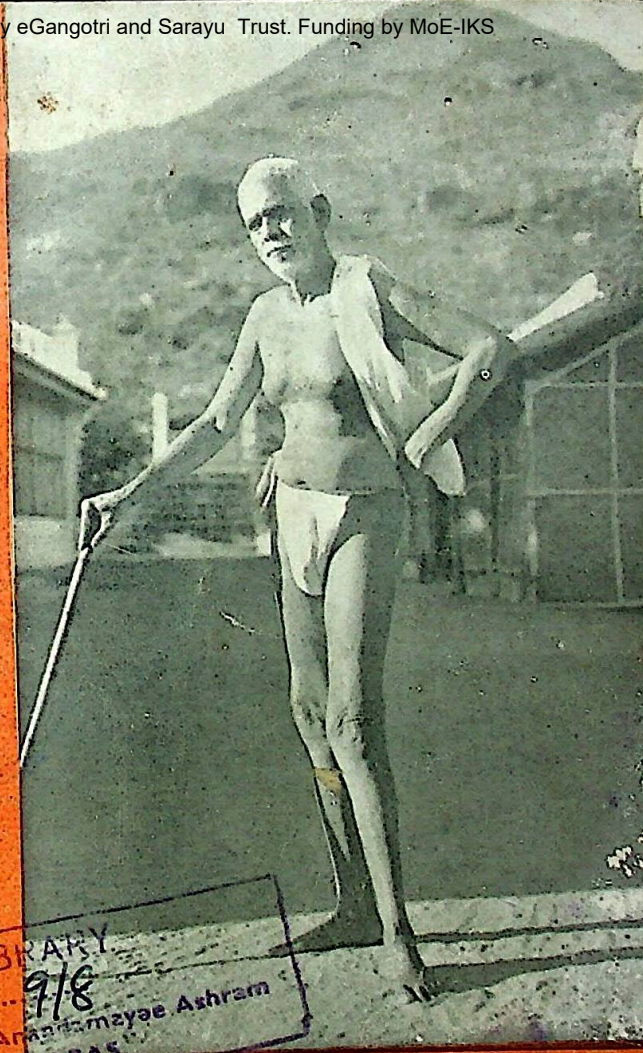

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He who sees inaction in action, & action in inaction, is wise amongmen; he is a yogi, who has accomplished all action.

(Gita. 4-18)

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THE LAST DAYS AND MAHA-NIRVANA OF BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA

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ABSENCE

Lonely they go, with heavy heart,
The simple folk whose sunlight was His smile,
Who loved His laughter and deep silences
And gracious ways.
Hungry they go, who fed on Grace
As Ramana,
Whose only doctrine was their love of Him.
Life holds henceforth an endless emptiness,
Though filled with Grace.
Silent they sit before His tomb,
Or pace around.
Bereaved they go in a sad life ;
And well I know
The heart-ache for the living graciousness
This outer world will never hold again
For eyes of ours.

By A. O.

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THE LAST DAYS AND MAHA-NIRVANA

— OF —

BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA

I

THE unique manifestation of Divine Grace on earth known and loved by us as Bhagavan Sri Ramana receded into its Reality as night set in on Friday, April 14th, 1950. The very moment that Bhagavan entered into *Maha-Nirvana,* at 8-47 that night, the skies announced the great event with a long, slow trail of light.

Bhagavan Ramana moved with us, as one of us, though he had, even as a lad of 17, found his Unity with the Reality underlying all appearance and had remained ever since as that resplendent Pure Consciousness, the Self. Though he never left Arunachala after his first arrival there, the power of his Light spread silently through the world during the half century and more of his stay there. Many earnest seekers approached him and some found spiritual illumination in his presence. His mode of life was natural, his ways were gracious, his

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smile brought peace to the heart. His look was an initiation into Divine Mystery; his teaching was simple, direct and profound, based on man's natural experience of I-ness. He directed all to seek and find for themselves the Source of the ego, the Reality behind their individuality, from which all thoughts and actions proceed. His luminous abidance in the Self was itself teaching conveyed from heart to heart in silence. As all his actions were waves from the Light within, the grace of them attracted and uplifted all who came in contact with him.

What follows here is the closing chapter, an intimate account of the last year of life and the *Maha-Nirvana* of Bhagavan Sri Ramana.

At the end of 1948 a small growth, the size of a peanut, was noticed on Bhagavan's left elbow. It gradually grew in size and became painful when touched. By February 1949 it had grown into a tumour, the size of a small lemon. The doctor in charge of the Ashram dispensary removed it surgically, and the wound healed up in about ten days. At the time of the opening ceremony (Maha-Kumbhabhishekam) of the temple erected over the Samadhi of his mother in March, Bhagavan looked alright except for a little sagging of the skin at the elbow.

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Soon after this, however, the tumour returned over the operated part. Eminent surgeons from Madras came and examined it and, suspecting it to be malignant, they again removed it surgically on March 27th. Soon after this they treated the spot with radium. An examination of the affected tissue showed that the growth was sarcomatic.

Sarcoma is excruciatingly painful, especially in its later stages, and fatal. A fresh growth was already observed while the wound was healing; so the doctors suggested amputating the arm above the affected part in the hope of saving Bhagavan's precious life. Bhagavan smiled and replied: "There is no need for alarm. The body is itself a disease. Let it have its natural end. Why mutilate it? Simple dressing of the affected part is enough."

At this time, a village physician of some repute was allowed to try herbal treatment, but it had no success. There was further aggravation and sepsis set in. A medical board discussed the matter and decided upon a third operation in the hope of saving Bhagavan's life. Bhagavan was persuaded to agree to this. This third operation, on August 7th, was a major operation carefully organized and carried out by a team of doctors and surgeons. A week later it was followed by radium treatment to destroy the affected tissues.

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The wound was gradually healing up and Bhagavan's general health showed a slight improvement for about three months, so that hope revived in all hearts. And then again, to the dismay of all, the tumour re-appeared, higher up on the arm, at the end of November. This necessitated a fourth operation on December 19th. After this the doctors were definite that if the tumour again appeared there was nothing more they could do except administer palliatives.

At this stage homoeopathy was tried for a few weeks but it could not arrest the disease. Another tumour appeared adjoining the left armpit and grew rapidly. Two Ayurvedic physicians of repute now tried their treatment but without success. The whole of the left upper arm had become one terrific swelling.

Owing to constant oozing of blood through the open wound and the tumour, Bhagavan's system had turned anaemic. The poison of the disease had now spread, affecting the whole body. It was the last phase of sarcoma and the end was near.

Throughout this long time of pain and sickness Bhagavan was quite unconcerned. He had no personal inclination for any kind of treatment. Whenever a course of treatment was decided upon by the

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Ashram he abided by it, rather to please the devotees than to get cured. He has often said : " It is for us to witness all that happens," and his behaviour was a perfect illustration of this. In December 1949, when the devotees were at a loss what treatment to try next, one of them approached Bhagavan and asked him and he replied with a smile : " Have I ever asked for any treatment ? It is you who want this and that for me, so it is you who must decide. If I were asked I should always say, as I have said from the beginning, that no treatment is necessary. Let things take their course."

All the doctors who attended upon Bhagavan were struck by his super-human indifference to pain and his absolute unconcern even during and after operations. He took everything lightly and retained his sense of humour throughout. His casual remarks have often made the doctors and attendants laugh despite their anxiety.

A few hours after the serious operation of August, Bhagavan decided to give *darsan* to the many devotees who were waiting anxiously outside the Ashram dispensary, although he had been advised not to move out for some days. He was as serene as ever and even smiled from time to time. At noon next day, as soon as the doctors had left, he returned to the hall where he always sat, saying that he should

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not occupy the dispensary to the inconvenience of patients who needed to go there for treatment.

Doctors and others who saw Bhagavan even after the fourth operation were amazed at his tranquil expression and gracious smile. There was no sign of suffering in his face.

The seventy-first birthday of Bhagavan Sri Ramana was celebrated in his presence on January 5th, 1950. Bhagavan sat up for hours, morning and evening, amid his devotees, that festive day. He read through many hymns newly composed by devotees and heard them sung. The elephant of the Temple of Arunachala came and stood there for a while after bowing down to Bhagavan and then took leave of him by touching his feet with its trunk. A Rani who had come from North India to pay her respects took a motion picture of the scene. The atmosphere was full of joy, and the festivities ended with the prostration of the devotees to their Master after the Vedic chants.

Prayers and chanting of hymns for Bhagavan's recovery went on for months at the Ashram and outside. Once, when Bhagavan was asked about their efficacy he replied with a smile : " It is certainly desirable to be engaged in good activities ; let them continue."

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Bhagawan Sri Ramana Maharshi
(Ten days before Mahanirvana)

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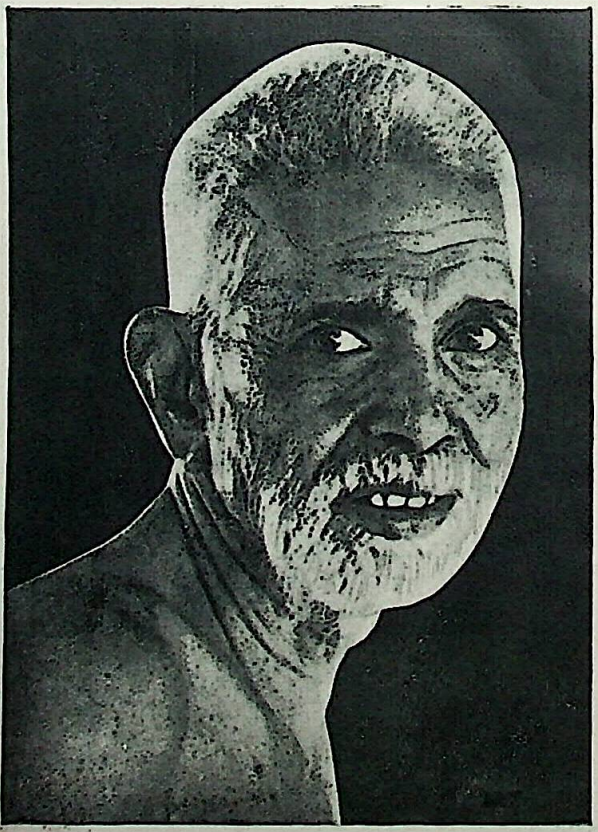

Bhagawan Sri Ramana Maharshi

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When the devotees prayed to Bhagavan himself to set his health right by his own potent will, he replied: "Everything will come right in due course." And he asked them: "Who is there to will this?" He could not will or desire anything, having lost the sense of separate individuality in the Universal Consciousness.

Bhagavan kept to his normal daily routine until it became physically impossible for him. He took his morning bath an hour before sunrise, sat up for *darsan* at fixed hours, morning and evening, went through the Ashram correspondence and supervised the printing of the Ashram publications, often making suggestions. Everything received his attention despite his ill-health.

More than a year before his *Maha-Nirvana,* Bhagavan quoted and rendered into Tamil verse a sloka from Srimad Bhagavatam (Skandha XI, ch. 13, sl. 36): "Let the body, the result of fructifying *karma,* rest or move about, live or die, the Sage who has realized the Self is not aware of it, just as one in drunken stupor is not aware of his clothing."

Late in 1949 Bhagavan picked up and expounded a verse from Yoga-Vasishtam: "The *Jnani* who has found himself as formless pure Awareness is

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unaffected though his body be cleft with a sword. Sugar-candy does not lose its sweetness though broken or crushed."

On one occasion during the last months, Bhagavan said to an anxious attendant : "When we have finished a meal do we keep the leaf-plate on which we have eaten it ?" On another occasion he told him that the *Jnani* rejoices to be relieved of the body by death as a servant rejoices to lay down his burden at the place of delivery.

With a look of compassion he consoled a devotee, saying : "They take this body for Bhagavan and attribute suffering to him. What a pity ! They are despondent that Bhagavan is going to leave them and go away ; where can he go, and how ?"

When one of his attendants entered his room, Bhagavan greeted him with a smile and asked : "Do you know what *Moksha* (Liberation) is ?" The attendant looked at the Master in receptive silence and Bhagavan continued : "Getting rid of non-existent misery and attaining Bliss which is the only existence, that is the definition of *Moksha !*"

Even during the last days, when Bhagavan was unable to leave his room, he continued to give *darsan* to the hundreds of devotees, morning and evening,

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reclining on his bed within, majestic like Bhishma on his bed of arrows. Bhagavan would not consent to have the *darsan* cancelled even on days when his condition was critical, so it went on right up to the last evening.

The news of the rapid decline in Bhagavan's physical condition spread and hundreds of devotees came to Tiruvannamalai to have a last *darsan*. In the queue that filed past his room there were men and women, rich and poor, learned and simple, from all parts of India and from abroad, all united in their devotion to this Divine Personification.

On Wednesday evening, two days before the *Maha-Nirvana,* Bhagavan gave a peculiar look of Grace to devotees who passed before him in the queue. It struck some of them that this might be his parting look, and it turned out to be so, for during the next two days Bhagavan had not the physical strength to turn about and look at the devotees. Whether his eyes were open or closed, his mind was always clear and he spoke to the attendants when necessary.

On Thursday morning, when a doctor brought Bhagavan some medicine to relieve congestion in the lungs, Bhagavan told him that it was not necessary and that everything would come right within two

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days. That night Bhagavan told his attendants to retire for sleep or meditation and leave him alone.

On Friday morning, Bhagavan said "thanks" to an attendant who had just finished massaging his body. The attendant, who did not know English, blinked with surprise, so Bhagavan, smiling, explained to him the meaning of the English term. It is probable that, when about to leave the physical plane, Bhagavan intended thus to express his thanks to all who had served him.

That evening there was a vast gathering of devotees and all had darsan of Bhagavan. Many stayed at the Ashram after darsan, as Bhagavan's condition was critical. At about sunset Bhagavan asked his attendants to raise him to a sitting position. They raised him up as comfortably as they could, one of them gently supporting his head. One of the doctors began to give him oxygen but Bhagavan motioned them to stop it with a wave of his right hand.

There were ten or twelve persons, doctors and attendants, in the small room. Two of them were fanning Bhagavan. Hundreds of devotees were anxiously waiting just outside. A group of devotees seated on the temple ramp opposite the little room began chanting with devotional fervour the

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Hymn to Arunachala composed long ago by Bhagavan, with the chorus 'Arunachala Siva'. Bhagavan's eyes opened a little and flashed for a moment. From their outer edges tears of ecstasy rolled down.

The last breaths followed one another softly, smoothly, and then, with no premonition, no shock, breathing stopped.

Bhagavan had receded into his Reality, the Heart of the Universe. The extraordinary peace of that hour overwhelmed every one in his Presence, felt more now than ever before. It was the transcendental Glory of Bhagavan, the Luminous Self, that prevailed.

Bhagavan Ramana proclaimed in silence :

"Unveiled, here I am, Effulgent in my Eternal Reality."

* * * *

"Who art Thou, Arunachala Ramana? What God or Siddha?"—A devotee once asked Bhagavan in verse, when he was living in Virupaksha Cave on Arunachala. And Bhagavan replied in verse : "The Supreme Self, the Blissful Pure Conscious-

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ness sporting within the Heart of all Gods and creatures, is Arunachala Ramana."

To those blessed devotees who have contacted Bhagavan at heart, he is the Eternal Presence, the unchanging Reality, the Substratum of all appearance. But even we, the many who have not understood and utilised properly this rare opportunity of Bhagavan's advent in our midst, the potency of his Grace is such that it will, in course of time, effect the spiritual transformation in us, anihilate our ego, the source of all evil, and absorb us back into the Life Eternal. Let us open and surrender ourselves to his Grace.

Blessed is the dust that has come in contact with his lotus-feet. His words are our beacon-light. The Samadhi *at the foot of the south slope of Arunachala, the Hill of Fire, enshrining the holy frame of our Master and Lord is our sanctuary where we still feel his living Presence as vividly as at the place of his* Maha-Nirvana. *May it bless us all for ever! May Ramana's Light, Love and Peace spread ever wider! May his Grace reign supreme!*

—VISWANATHAN.

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II

One of the great epics is finished, one of the supreme manifestations of Divine Grace, when God wore a human body and moved and talked with men as Bhagavan Sri Ramana, called Maharshi, the Great Rishi. Bhagavan was a man abiding in constant, unwavering consciousness of identity with the Self, which is God, or, to express the same from the other side, he was God wearing a human body and submitting deliberately to human limitations. For fifty-four years his wearing the body was one long sacrifice for our redemption, and at the end the sacrifice became a martyrdom.

When he consented to wear the human form after transcending the human and all other states, Bhagavan accepted all its limitations—to feel heat and cold, to suffer pain and sickness, to be bound by ignorance of events. Had he worn a human body but set himself free from its conditions of pain and sickness and ignorance of events, people would have said: "It is easy for him to tell us to abide in the heart, unperturbed by events, because he has no pain or uncertainty and we have". So he accepted pain and uncertainty as features of the human form and showed that they cannot touch the equanimity

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of the Jnani, *who remains fixed immovably in the Real.*

Just as Bhagavan accepted the limitations of human knowledge, so did he accept the limitations of human powers. There have been Spiritual Masters who have worked miracles to exhibit the supremacy of spiritual over physical laws and to show men what a resplendent birthright was theirs for the taking, but the purpose of Bhagavan was different : it was to remain fixed in the Self amid all the limitations of human life. Therefore he used no powers that others do not use.

* * * *

THERE was once a discussion in the Ashram hall as to how long Bhagavan would live. Some quoted the astrologers as saying that he would live to be 80 ; others either denied the accuracy of astrology or doubted its applicability to Bhagavan, who had no more *karma* to work out, being One with the Self. Bhagavan listened to the discussion, smiling but taking no part in it. A newcomer, puzzled by this, asked : " What does Bhagavan think about it ? Bhagavan did not reply but smiled approvingly as one of the devotees replied for him : " Bhagavan does not think about it."

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The whole last year of his bodily life was an illustration of this. We grieved over the suffering and dreaded the threatened death ; he did not.

Bhagavan had long suffered from rheumatism, and early in 1949 a small nodule appeared under the elbow of his left arm. In February the Ashram doctor cut it out, though it was not looked upon as anything serious. Within a month it returned, larger and more painful, and this time it was recognized as a malignant tumour and there was general alarm. Doctors came from Madras to operate, but the wound did not heal and the tumour very soon began to grow again, larger and higher up.

Henceforth there was an air of tragedy and inevitably about the march of events. The orthodox medical men let it be known that they could not cure the tumour but could only operate, that it might return after operation, despite radium treatment, and that if it did, it would eventually prove fatal. Those of other schools believed that they could cure it and that operating would only bring it back in a worse form, as in fact happened. During the following months there were two more operations, each with the same result.

And there was the deeper feeling of inevitability far beyond the medical : that Bhagavan knew what

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was appropriate and pitied us for having to witness his suffering and sought to give us strength to endure his body's death. Indeed, this long, painful sickness came to appear more and more as a means of preparing us for the inevitable parting which many felt they would be unable to endure ; more profoundly it came to appear as payment of the *karma* he had lifted from us, as expiation of the sins of the world he had taken upon himself. A devotee begged him to give the sickness to her instead, and he replied : " And who gave it to me ? " We did, as surely as though we had crucified him. A schoolgirl was told in a letter about the impending danger and wrote back that " Bhagavan knows what is best for us," and the face of Bhagavan was radiant with pleasure as he read her letter and commended her wisdom because she had not said " what is best for him " but " what is best for us."

Already frail and weakened by rheumatism, Bhagavan's body now grew steadily weaker. Already by September the end would have surprised nobody, least of all the doctors. By December it had come to be a matter of waiting and counting the weeks and days. By the beginning of 1950 the tumour had reached the shoulder and gone inwards. The doctors said that the pain must be terrible, but Bhagavan gave no sign of it. He was smiling and gracious as usual. In fact more than usual, for to-

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wards the end his face became ever softer and more gentle. Right up to the end his eyes shone with their old radiance and he insisted on giving darshan to all who came. During the last days, when he was too weak to move, arrangements were made, morning and evening, for the silent throng of worshippers to file past the open doorway where he lay. Only once the Ashram authorities, fearing that it was too strenuous for him, cancelled the darshan, but he immediately protested and had it renewed, and to the last day it was continued.

Some have comforted themselves with the thought that the *Jnani* does not feel pain, but those who were in attendance on Bhagavan were convinced of the reality of the suffering. Indeed, he would sometimes admit, "There is pain," though he would never say, "I have pain." While wearing a body, he accepted the body's sensations although in constant awareness of the Self. He felt heat and cold, distinguished sweet and salt, yellow and red: and with pain as with all other sensations. Only he never for a moment confused the suffering body with the Self.

Throughout, Bhagavan co-operated loyally with the doctors, and yet with an air of dutiful submission to authority rather than with any interest in the outcome. Occasionally he protested at the

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amount of attention bestowed on his body. Several times, when there seemed to be an improvement, he declared that he wanted no more treatment. Only on one occasion did he refuse to submit, and that was when it was proposed to amputate the arm.

Many devotees offered remedies or wished to try some other treatment, and the attitude of Bhagavan was typical of his utter selflessness. Loyalty to the doctor who was in charge forbade him to accept such offers, but he would show interest and consideration, not for his own health, but for their devotion and the pains they had taken. Once, when the condition was already desperate, he was asked by the Ashram authorities to say himself what kind of treatment he would prefer, and he replied simply that he would take whatever treatment they could agree upon.

Many a time devotees implored him to desire to be well, if only for our sake. On one occasion a devotee begged him to give but a single thought to getting well, as that would be enough, and he replied: "Who could have such a thought!" It was evident that, having submitted to the conditions of human life, he would use no powers for his cure that ordinary men and women could not use.

He simply sat as a spectator, watching the disease destroy the body. He had immense compassion for

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those who grieved over the suffering, and he sought constantly to appease their grief, not the easy way, by removing the suffering and postponing death for a few years, but the fundamental way by making them realize that the body was not Bhagavan.

The last few days, enormous crowds had gathered, because it was plain that the end was coming. And the long suffering had at last inclined people to accept death as a relief. He said more than once during these days : " They say I am dying, but I am not going away. Where could I go ? I am here."

On April 14th, the doctors and attendants knew that it was the last day. In the morning he bade them go and meditate. About noon, when his liquid food was brought, he asked the time, punctual as ever, but then added : " But henceforth time doesn't matter." In his delicate way of expressing recognition of service, he said : " The English have a word *thanks*, but we only say *santosham*."

The devotees also, passing in long line that morning, silent with grief, before the doorway where he lay, saw an almost lifeless body, the face pinched, the stomach sunken, the ribs protruding. And after the evening darshan they felt that it was the end. Instead of dispersing to their homes as they usually

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did, they hung about in small groups or stood silently waiting or sat in grief along the temple ramp facing the little room where Bhagavan lay. There was an air of foreboding. Many eyes were fixed on the window of the room and the two fans gently waving inside—the sign that there was still a living body to fan.

A group of *sadhus* and devotees sat together on the temple ramp just opposite the little room and began singing *Arunachala-Siva,* the supreme song of Divine Love that Bhagavan has given us. More joined in. The singing swelled louder to drown murmurs and cries of grief. Inside the room, Bhagavan bade them sit him up. The pain must have been intense, but he found it appropriate to die sitting, as our Guru. At the sound of *Arunachala-Siva,* he opened his luminous, untroubled eyes, with a brief smile of indescribable tenderness, and a tear of bliss trickled down from the outer corner of his eyes. And then, at 8-47, breathing stopped. There was no struggle or spasm, no other sign of death : only that the next breath did not come.

For a few moments people stood bewildered. The singing continued. A French press photographer who had been pacing the road outside came quickly into the throng and asked a devotee at what precise moment it had happened. The devotee, taking it

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to be journalistic callousness, answered brusquely that he did not know, and then, recalling Bhagavan's unfailing courtesy, gave as precise an answer as he could ; and the photographer thereupon declared that at that very moment an enormous star had passed slowly across the sky. Many had seen it, even as far away as Madras. Many who were not present felt what it portended.

After the first numbness there was a wild burst of grief. The body was carried out on to the balcony of the room, and men and women crowded near and wept aloud.

The body was placed garlanded upon a couch in the temple hall and the devotees thronged there and sat around it. One had expected the face to be rock-like in *samadhi,* but it was so pitiable, so marked by pain. Only gradually during the night the air of mysterious composure returned to it.

All that night devotees sat in the large hall and townsfolk passed through in awed silence. Some of the devotees sang songs of praise and grief, others sat silent. And yet, what was most noticeable was not the grief but the calm. For they were men and women deprived of him whose love had been the very meaning of their life. Already that first night, and much more during the days that followed, it

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became clear how vital had been his words: "I am here." It was not the mere intellectual truism that the Self cannot go away; it was a promise full of love and warmth. One after another, devotees would say, each as though it were a discovery of his own, "Bhagavan has not gone away; I feel his presence more than ever."

The body was interred next day with divine honours in the ground between the old hall where Bhagavan had sat so many years and the north wall of the temple. It is hoped eventually to erect there a Hall of Silence where devotees from far and near can come and sit in meditation as they did before the living Ramana. Even now, those who sit there before the *samadhi* find the Grace of Bhagavan as powerful and as sweet and subtle as during his body's lifetime. Some who lived there have remained. Some who went away have returned. Many more will come. For, according to his promise, he has not left us. He is here in our hearts. He is here at Arunachala.

—ARTHUR OSBORNE.

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Waiting for Dharsan

Queue for Dharsan

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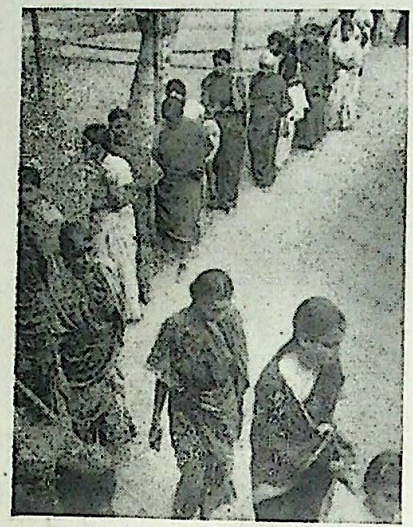
Devotees awaiting Dharsan

Outside Sick-Chamber



Lady Devotees in Queue
for Dharsan

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III

THE Maharshi was our great solace and we have lost him for ever. During his last illness he taught us how a *Jivan-Mukta* takes suffering ; he gave us the most perfect lesson in forbearance. We know what excruciating pain his malady must have caused him, and yet he went through it in silence, submitting to every painful complication, without a remonstrance, without a single word of complaint. To stand by and watch him suffer like this, unable to relieve the suffering, was the most painful part for many of us. The tumour progressed on its relentless course, unchecked by treatment, sapping his strength and eating into his flesh. But Bhagavan chose to be indifferent to it. He let the Ashram routine go on as usual. There was no wincing on his face to show pain, not one groan to indicate suffering. He remained calm and peaceful as though nothing was the matter with his body, as though the ailment was on some other body and he was a mere spectator. He was not callous to the condition but showed no concern about it. He took whatever medicine was given to him and submitted to the doctors' treatment, never showing preference for this or that line of treatment, never complaining against anything, never remarking that the remedy failed to bring relief. His calm, his submissive and

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uncomplaining attitude was beyond our understanding. It made us wonder whether he was really suffering at all. He lived so distinctly apart from his body that his face was radiant with graciousness while his body lay mute with unexpressed suffering. We marvelled at this transcendental state in which the individual body still persisted but no individual mind or will remained to function in it. It has been asked why Bhagavan did not choose to be well again, if only for the sake of his devotees. A miracle would have been so easy a matter for him; the body would have obeyed his will so inevitably. The best answer is that there was no longer any individual in him who could will to be well again.

And yet we cannot but ask why Bhagavan took on himself this long suffering. Some say that he had taken the *prarabdha* of his mother, whose life and breath he stilled by sitting at her death-bed with his hands on her heart and head. Some say that it is the sin of his devotees that Bhagavan took upon himself. To me it is a riddle beyond my understanding. This suffering wounded the hearts of thousands of Bhagavan's devotees. Many of them would gladly have laid down their lives to relieve him.

It was a moving sight to see men and women sitting in silence and sorrow all day long and all

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night through. The Maharshi had such magnetic love ; he had the power to heal the hearts of his devotees without one word spoken. Each devotee—and there are thousands of them—feels that Bhagavan has endowed him with some special grace and attention ; all feel that they received at his hands what they wanted ; all are satisfied that they are his chosen followers though no word of *upadesh* might have passed between them and Bhagavan.

Out of the most simple, the most unassuming human form, lying helpless on a couch, emanated such dynamic force as captivated every heart that perceived it. High and low, learned and simple, were equally at his call, but he desired nothing from them. Every one was welcome to him. He had a smile for many even on his last day. When his end was only a few hours ahead two peacocks sat screeching upon a neighbouring tree, and Bhagavan heard and asked whether they had been given their usual meal of nuts. The way birds and animals showed their affection for him had always been remarkable. It was a sight to see the peacocks strutting round his room, now calling, now dancing, as though they too were claiming the *darsan* that was denied to them after Bhagavan became bed-ridden. The cow, the dog, the monkey, each had its own way of showing its attachment to Bhagavan.

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It was remarkable how Bhagavan kept perfect control of his faculties to the very end. He spoke clearly only a few minutes before the end. The long line of devotees trudged past his room from 4 to 5 that evening. Then Bhagavan asked to be sat up ; he insisted on ignoring the pain in his arm and body and remained sitting till he breathed his last.

During the preceding months Bhagavan had let fall many remarks to prepare us for his physical death. Once he remarked to a devotee that this body is a load to be shaken off : " When a man goes to market with a basket and fills it with purchases and then carries it home on his head, does he not long to put down the load ? "

On another occasion he compared the body to a plantain leaf on which delicious food had been served : after eating one's fill from it, does one take the leaf and preserve it ? Do we not, Bhagavan asked, throw away the leaf from which we have eaten once it has served its purpose ? To some of the attendants who had long served him and who had intimate contact with him he is said to have remarked a few days before the end : " Who is to carry this load of a body even after it needs assistance in everything ? Do you expect me to carry about this load that it would take four men to carry ?

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So Bhagavan cast away his body. He has flown from the cage, but for us the loss is irreparable. We have lost for ever our solace in life. We can no longer seek the consolation we infallibly received at the very sight of Bhagavan. Never more shall we set eyes on our beloved Bhagavan, never more behold that radiant face, that look of love and compassion, that smile and nod of understanding. Never again shall we hear the magic of his voice. We can see our God no more, hear him no more, touch him no more. Gone forever the days when we could challenge the world and say : " Here in flesh and blood is a *Jivan-Mukta,* the embodiment of our scriptures, in whose presence the greatest philosopher and the greatest scientist will shrink to a pigmy."

The scenes immediately after Bhagavan's departure from earth were enough to remind one of the city of Ayodhya when Rama deserted it for the forest—the surging crowds unmindful of the heat the whole of the following day, the outpourings of the devotees, the loud cries of *Haro Hara!* the women and children as well as men standing patiently in the throng, every one eager for a last look at the body their beloved Master had worn so long and had now discarded—all this was moving beyond words.

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Though the living beauty of his body is taken away from us, we still have the Grace of Arunachala. When Bhagavan first realized the Self he chose Arunachala as his permanent abode. He came there at the age of 17 and never left, never thought of leaving. He has made Arunachala sacred for his devotees, as it was for him.

Once a young girl invited the Maharshi to go with her to her house at Madras. The Maharshi smiled and said : " If I left this place, would not the visitors who come expecting to find me here be disappointed ? You have come with your parents to see me. If I were not here, would you not be disappointed ? And even if I left this place, what certainty is there that I should reach your house. There would be so many calls and so many places for me to visit, that I might never reach your house at all."

When Bhagavan was too weak even to walk unaided and when some of us pleaded with him to move about less and to rest his body more, he spoke patronisingly, as it were, of his legs : " These legs have carried me for miles every day. There were days when I used to walk long distances. There is not a spot on the hill or in the town that I have not visited. And now they are failing me. Perhaps I am returning to my second childhood." The holy place of Arunachala has been made holier by the

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lotus feet of our Master. The whole place is full of memories of our Bhagavan. Every spot, every scene has an association that calls Bhagavan to our minds. Looking at the slopes of the hill one can picture his graceful form moving up or down with stick and *kamandalu*. Looking at the couch, one imagines the gracious form of Bhagavan recumbent there again, with his radiant eyes turned upon us. Going into the dining hall one imagines Bhagavan there as before. One can feel his living presence in every corner of the Ashram.

Deep down beneath our pain and bereavement we know that Bhagavan has not left us. He has only left his body. He who taught us in silence can guide us in the Spirit. His Presence and influence, though unseen, abide with us. Though the physical presence is lost to us, if we seek his Light we shall find it. The Light of Bhagavan has merged in the universal Light of the Self. A remarkable occular demonstration of this was the phenomenon of star-like radiance that trailed across the sky at the very moment of his *Maha-Nirvana*. It was seen by many even as far away as Madras, and many who saw it knew intuitively what it portended. May that Light guide us and pervade the Universe! May He continue to lead us to the Light, and may we be worthy of His Guidance!

—Dr. T. N. Krishnaswamy.

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PRESENCE

There was no emptiness, no cause for tears,
When I went back to Arunachala
And trod the ways that for these many years
Shone with God's Grace in form of Ramana.

A living quietude throbbed in the air,
Peace in the earth and solace in the trees,
And the great hill rose, tender and aware,
Simple as Truth, as full of mysteries.

His Presence so pervaded, it had been
No wonder or fulfilment, only Grace,
At any sudden turning to have seen
The majesty of the beloved face.

And then I sat in silence, as of old,
Before Him. Like a sudden wave
His mighty Peace surged through me to enfold
In Knowledge-Being beyond birth and grave.

Peace is not langour but intensest life
Whereon events float in a shallow stream
Too slight for prayer and tinkling into strife,
Unreal, as though one waking saw a dream.

Ineffable, beyond the range of thought,
The timeless Peace that from His Presence flows;
Even vaster now the wealth of Grace He brought
Through human form and formless now bestows.

By A. O.

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